



(Top left) THE WINTER of 1929-30 is noted for the complete freeze of the Columbia River. River boats were used to break through the ice. (Top right) Before dam construction, floods were a common occurrence on Government Island. (Bottom left) Barges were used to transport cows to and from

the island. (Bottom right) River boats stopped frequently at the island to pick up passengers and cream from dairy cows. (Photos courtesy of Margaret Eldred)

## River brings young couple together

By SANDRA WALTERS  
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The Columbia River had a way of bringing people together, and in the case of Jean Spencer's parents, if it hadn't been for the river they may have never met.

### Early days

Spencer's grandparents, Frank and Florence Laver, bought land on Government Island from a Mr. Schwebel on the east end of the island. Her grandfather had been a hired hand to Schwebel before buying the land.

Spencer's mother, Frances Laver, was born in a house on Government Island in 1898. The white house still remains and is visible from State Route 14.

"My mother went to the one-room school house on the island and the teachers housed with the pupils on the island," she said. "When they wanted entertainment, they would cross the river to Fishers Landing or Pumpkin Center, as it was also called, for the dances."

"After farming cows and vegetables on the island, my grandparents decided to move to Portland in 1907, when my mother was nine," Spencer said. "My grandparents left the farm for my uncle William to farm."

Spencer said that when her mother was 16 she went to live with her brother on the island and went to the dances in Camas and

Washougal with him. In order to reach the dances they would cross the railroad tracks and proceed to either the grange or barn dances.

"My mother told a story of how when they would come home from the dances this rooster would crow and her brother, William, was afraid he'd wake everyone up," she said. "So one time on the way home the rooster started doing his crowing and her brother reached up, wrung his neck and they took him home for dinner."

### Parents meet

During World War I Spencer's mother, whose brother was still farming on the island, was visiting her parents at Long Beach, Wash.

"What many people don't know is that several people who lived on the island owned land at Long Beach," Spencer said. "My grandparents had a beach cottage and a ranch in Long Beach."

While there she met Richard Spencer, an officer in the Navy, who was stationed at Northhead, Wash., to protect the Columbia River.

The couple married in 1917.

"If it hadn't been for my father protecting the river for the Navy they probably would have never met," Spencer said.

### Island visits

Spencer remembers when she and her

family would visit her mother's brother on the island as she was growing up.

The island had electricity and telephones, but these items were not connected to the mainland. The people on the island could contact each other but not people off the island.

"Because we couldn't call uncle William to tell him when we were coming, arrival

times were never confirmed," Spencer said. "My dad would whistle to my uncle and when he heard the whistle he would row across the river and pick us up to take us to the island."

Spencer said her family visited the island until her uncle was bought out by the government in the 1950s.